



WISCONSIN LEGISLATURE

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Hansen and Genrich introduce Groundwater Protection Bill

Bill would confront water quality crisis in Northeast Wisconsin

Today, State Senator Dave Hansen (D-Green Bay) and State Representative Eric Genrich (D-Green Bay) announced plans to introduce legislation to protect the public's drinking water from contamination resulting from the rapid expansion of concentrated animal feeding operations (CAFOs) in rural areas where the makeup of the land cannot support high volume manure spreading.

"We are dealing with a public health crisis," said Genrich. "We have communities in Northeast Wisconsin where half of the wells that are tested are contaminated and the water is undrinkable, where residents no longer have access to safe, clean drinking water. That is not acceptable."

The bill, LRB-0901/2, seeks to identify and protect areas that are particularly susceptible to groundwater contamination due to shallow soil depths and topographical features known as karst. Karst areas are characterized by exposed and fractured bedrock that can allow contaminants, such as manure, to penetrate the bedrock and enter groundwater. The spreading of high volumes of manure in karst areas has led to widespread well contamination in several communities in Northeast Wisconsin.

"While CAFOs are a part of Wisconsin's farming landscape, we are seeing more and more the problems that arise when high volume manure spreading is allowed on land that cannot support it," said Hansen. "The people of Northeast Wisconsin should not have to worry about the quality of their drinking water and how it affects the health of their children."

Under the bill, the Department of Natural Resources (DNR) would be required to identify karst-susceptible areas and to develop regulations to establish acceptable manure spreading practices in those areas. The DNR would also assume responsibility for enforcing those regulations. Violators would face a citation or further penalties as determined by the local district attorney.

While much of the attention is currently centered on Northeast Wisconsin and Kewaunee County, where nearly 30 percent of wells tested countywide are contaminated, karst topography stretches across much of the state and into Minnesota (see attached map of karst potential). In Minnesota, regulations similar to those established under this bill are already in place.